

## II.—THE ROMAN MAUSOLEUM ON SHORDEN BRAE, BEAUFONT, CORBRIDGE, NORTHUMBERLAND.

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Shorden (or Shordon) Brae is the name given to a twenty-seven acre field on the terrace, 100 ft. above Ordnance Datum, which overlooks the flood plain of the Tyne, opposite the mouth of the Devil's Water (fig. 1). The field, which until recently was subdivided by a north to south fence, forms part of the home farm of the Beaufont Estate. It is bounded on the west and south by the Red House Burn, and on the east by the Cor Burn, which flow together into the Tyne. The field lies between the site of the Roman town at Corbridge and the Roman bath-house at Red House.<sup>1</sup> The precise line of the Roman road running westwards from Corbridge is not known on the west side of the Cor Burn, but it cannot be far from Shorden Brae.

In 1949 Dr. J. K. S. St. Joseph, Curator of Aerial Photography in the University of Cambridge, observed and photographed from the air the crop mark of a hitherto unsuspected structure, at map reference NY 976649, near the southern edge of the brae and immediately to the west of the line of the superseded field boundary.<sup>2</sup> The structure, a hollow 33 ft. square within a precinct 135 ft. square, was reminiscent of the so-called Romano-Celtic temple,<sup>3</sup> and was accepted as the most northerly example of the type until, at the close of the excavation, its true character became apparent.

<sup>1</sup> AA 4 xxxvii, 85ff.

<sup>2</sup> JRS xli, 55.

<sup>3</sup> I. A. Richmond, *Roman Britain*, 1955, 192-194.

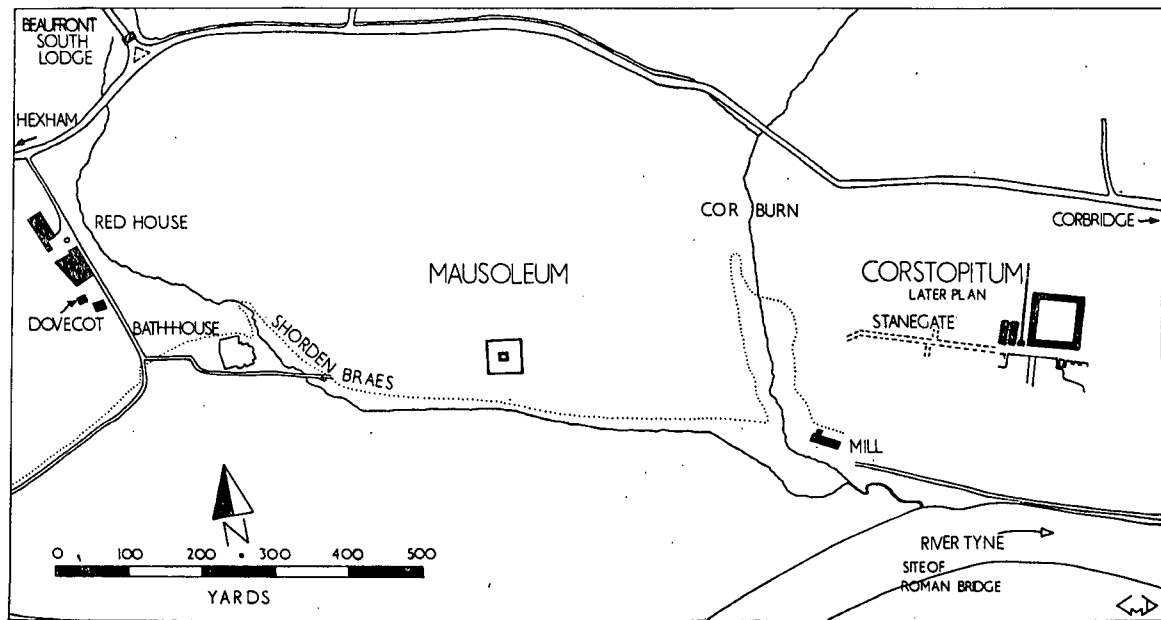


FIG. 1. SHORDEN BRAE: THE SITE AND ITS SETTING.

In 1957 the late Major David Cuthbert, of Beaufront, generously offered to allow a large part of Shorden Brae to be taken temporarily out of cultivation in order that the structure might be excavated. Dr. St. Joseph, its discoverer, readily placed his information at the excavators' disposal, and gave his approval. The excavation lasted from May 12th to August 23rd, 1958. It was directed by the writers, successively or jointly, on behalf of Durham University Excavation Committee, which financed the work from funds placed at its disposal by the Sir James Knott Trust and the Pilgrim Trust. Dr. N. McCord, Mr. A. J. H. Gunstone and Mr. R. Wood acted at different times as supervisors, while volunteer excavators and students, too numerous for individual mention, gave up their time and placed their skill at our disposal.

The inner square structure was completely excavated within a 10-ft. grid, in the hope, which was realized, of obtaining the optimum complete cross-section of any significant feature. The precinct wall was uncovered at its angles and cross-trenched at points along its sides. This was sufficient to establish its character, and, with the aid of the aerial photograph, its complete plan. Limited areas within the precinct were stripped to the top of the subsoil in a search for traces of timber structures, earlier than or contemporary with the buildings which appear on the aerial photograph, but no trace was found. As the subsoil is water-laid sand, which readily preserves such traces, and in fact preserved clear evidence of the superseded modern fence, the non-appearance of early timber structures may safely be taken as meaning their non-existence.

The mausoleum (folding plan), as the structure proved to be after all the evidence obtained had been considered, had consisted essentially of a central tower-like monument, within which there had been a burial shaft below ground level. The central monument occupied an apparently empty compound, bounded by a symmetrically planned precinct wall. Immediately outside the enclosure there were humbler burials or

monuments. As two were encountered by chance in the course of limited excavation, it is probable that there are many others awaiting discovery, and that Shorden Brae is the site of one of the cemeteries of the Roman fort or town, lying at no great distance from the main road to the west.

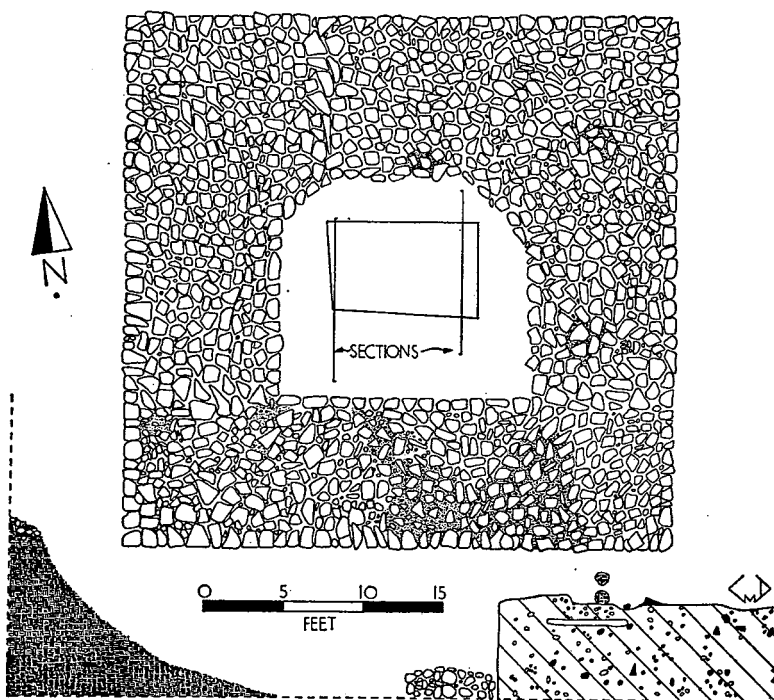


FIG. 2. SHORDEN BRAE MAUSOLEUM: THE CENTRAL MONUMENT.

Neither in the central monument, nor on the precinct wall, did any dressed masonry survive in position. What had appeared as crop marks in the ripening corn in 1949, were deep foundations of lime mortar and broken freestone.

The foundation of the central monument (fig. 2) is strictly rectangular. It measures externally 32 ft. 4 ins. from north to south by 34 ft. 4 ins. from east to west. Its thickness

varies between 9 and 10 ft. The foundation has a surviving depth of 6 ft., its top lying 1 ft. below the surface of the field at the time of the excavation. The maximum dimensions of the space enclosed by the foundation are 14 ft. from north to south by 16 ft. from east to west. While the southern inner corners are strictly rectangular, the upper part of the foundation intrudes into the central space at the northern inner corners, markedly so on the east.

The foundation consists of roughly broken pieces of local sandstone, some of them with a maximum dimension of well over a foot, set in hard grey lime mortar containing many pebbles. It would scarcely be an exaggeration to describe it as a concrete foundation reinforced with freestone. The foundation had been trench-built. On the east side an 8-ft. length of the outer face was uncovered to below its base. On both faces of the trial hole the section showed clean and undisturbed natural sand running without interruption up to the faces of the stones, or to the mortar between them. Experience during the excavation showed that a nearly vertical plane face cut in the sand would stand without crumbling for several weeks. At the time of construction a regular trench, 9 or 10 ft. wide, was evidently cut by the builders; liquid mortar and freestone were then laid and packed in, to a depth of 6 ft. from the bottom, filling the whole space. Such a process will explain the inward overlap of the upper part of the foundation at the northern corners of the inner space. The sharp angles of the up-standing central rectangular plateau of sand evidently crumbled, and the mortared foundation material filled the wider mouth of the trench.

So solid a foundation, of such depth and thickness, can only have been intended for a massive superstructure. No building in the Roman town of Corbridge has so impressive a foundation, though the sand and gravel subsoil is similar to that of Shorden Brae. Except for one small fragment of dressed sandstone, with curved-section mouldings on one face, which was found lying loose on top of the northern

part of the foundation, there was no evidence for the type of superstructure. Any attempt at detailed reconstruction of the monument could then only be conjectural. It is, however, clear that it was solid, tower-like, carefully finished and not lacking in enrichment.

Inside the building an almost rectangular shaft had been dug in Roman times. In the absence of floor levels or other stratigraphic connection, its chronological relationship to the foundation is incapable of demonstration. It is however in the highest degree likely that the shaft was a primary element in the construction. It is almost certain that it once contained the body of the person commemorated by the monument, and was the reason for its existence. At the level where it intersected the top of the subsoil the shaft measured between 9 ft. and 9 ft. 6 ins. from east to west, and between 5 ft. 6 ins. and 6 ft. from north to south. Its sides sloped slightly inwards towards the bottom, and the dimensions of the floor were several inches less than those of the mouth. The floor was 4 ft. below the top of the subsoil. The shaft lay some 2 ft. nearer the north side of the building than the south.

The shaft had been deliberately filled. The material of the filling was sharply differentiated in character between the top and bottom. This implies that there were two stages in the operation, though there is no need to infer that these were separated by any measurable interval of time. The lower part of the filling of the shaft, to a maximum, but by no means uniform, depth of a little over 1 ft., consisted of clean pale orange sand, differing scarcely at all in appearance from the material in which the shaft was dug. The upper part of the filling consisted of more mixed material which included both sand and clay; it had an overall blue-grey appearance which contrasted very sharply, in horizontal and vertical section, both with the undisturbed subsoil and with the lower filling. Except that it curved upwards at the sides of the shaft, giving a meniscus effect, the top of the second filling formed a horizontal plane, 2 ft. 6 ins. above the bottom. It

was as if the whole of a levelled-off filling had consolidated and sunk where not in contact with the sides of the shaft.

Numbers of rusty nails were found in this filling, particularly in a band running east to west, parallel with and about two feet from the north edge of the shaft. They were disposed with only approximate regularity, and they had doubtless moved somewhat from their original positions after the decay of the woodwork which they had once joined, as a result of the consolidation of the filling. From their position, and from the fact that the shaft had been refilled, it is more likely that the nails came from a coffin, lying almost central in the shaft on an east to west axis, than from a timber lining to the shaft.

Excavation in horizontal layers failed to reveal any stains left by decayed bones, though such stains had already been observed on another part of the site. Even there only the faintest traces were noted, and it is clear that the soil on Shorden Brae devours organic material. It is probable that a body once lay in a wooden coffin in the shaft, but that it had vanished without trace. Experience elsewhere has shown that calcined bones would have survived had they been present.

Immediately on the blue-grey filling of the shaft, and in strict conformity with it, lay an inch-thick uniform layer of soot. Except where later intrusions had disturbed it, this was continuous. It in no way resembled the debris of a timber building destroyed by fire, and it had doubtless been spread over the filling as soon as the burial ceremony was complete. Its significance can only be guessed at. Though we are dealing with inhumation, not cremation, fire may have played some part in the ceremony.

The construction of the foundation, the digging of the shaft, the insertion of a coffin containing an unburnt body the former presence of which is inferred, the two stages of filling, and the spreading of the soot over the filled shaft, seem all to have been elements in a single process. In the soot were found eighteen fragments from a single Roman vessel, includ-

ing parts of the base, rim and wall (fig. 3, no. 1). It had been subject to intense heat which had caused parts of it to fuse and buckle and the surface to bubble. This undoubtedly happened in the fire from which the soot was obtained. It is the only datable object from the initial filling, and thus, apart from a stamped amphora handle discussed below, the

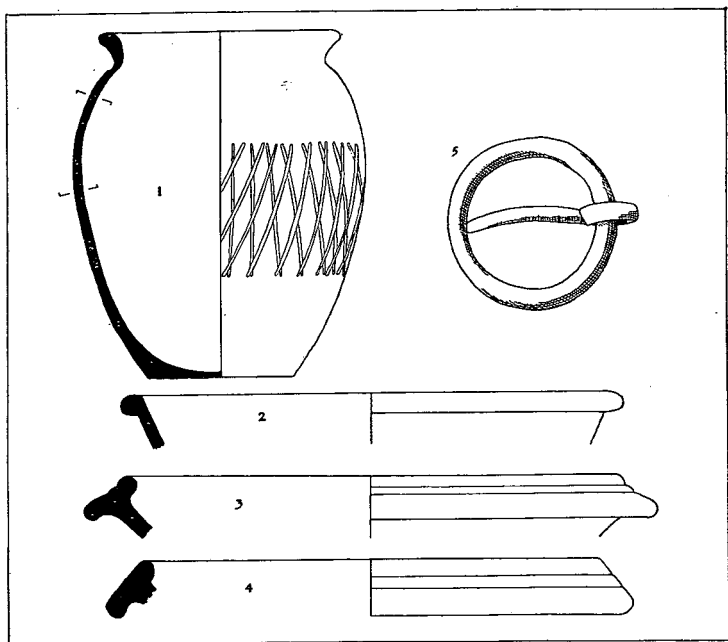


FIG. 3. SHORDEN BRAE: POTTERY ( $\frac{1}{4}$ ) AND BROOCH ( $\frac{1}{1}$ ).

only direct evidence for the date of the structure. It is clear from the undistorted fragments to which type the vessel belongs. It is a wheel-made jar with the plain cut-away base of a cooking-pot. The fabric is smooth, and, except where affected by fire, light grey. The cross-hatched decoration is acute-angled, and the individual strokes are lightly applied and comparatively broad. In all respects the vessel is a



normal example of the closely datable type 116.<sup>4</sup> In the north, this type of jar emerged before the middle of Hadrian's reign, about the same time as the black burnished cooking-pot, which, however, drove the wheel-made type off the market so rapidly that it is rarely found in post-Hadrianic deposits. The vessel provides firm and unambiguous evidence that the ceremonial fire, and thus the erection of the monument, took place after c. A.D. 125. While it is theoretically possible that the vessel might have survived in use until old fashioned, the odds against this are long, for long-term survivals in use are rare. There can be no question of its having survived as rubbish, for all the pottery fragments from the deposit are from the same vessel. It is therefore certain that the mausoleum was erected in or after the second quarter of the second century, and highly probable that it was within, rather than after, that period.

On two subsequent occasions the upper part of the filling of the shaft was disturbed. Above the soot lay a thicker layer of rubble, intermixed with the debris of lime mortar, most of it white in colour but with some admixture of brick red. While this material did not penetrate the soot or the top of the filling on the west side of the shaft (fig. 4), on the east side it penetrated to a depth of over a foot (fig. 5), and was clearly an intrusion into it. It has the appearance of debris from a careful dismantling of the monument. The intrusion into the filling of the shaft was probably the consequence of the removal by digging of some structure standing above the grave, rather than an attempt to break into it. While there was no direct evidence for the date of this intrusion, there is evidence that a structure at the south-east corner of the precinct wall was dismantled in late Roman times. On the reasonable assumption that the two elements in the monument were simultaneously dismantled, the first intrusion into the top of the filling of the shaft may be assigned to late in the Roman period.

Over most of the interior of the central monument an

<sup>4</sup> AA 4 xxxv, 180ff.

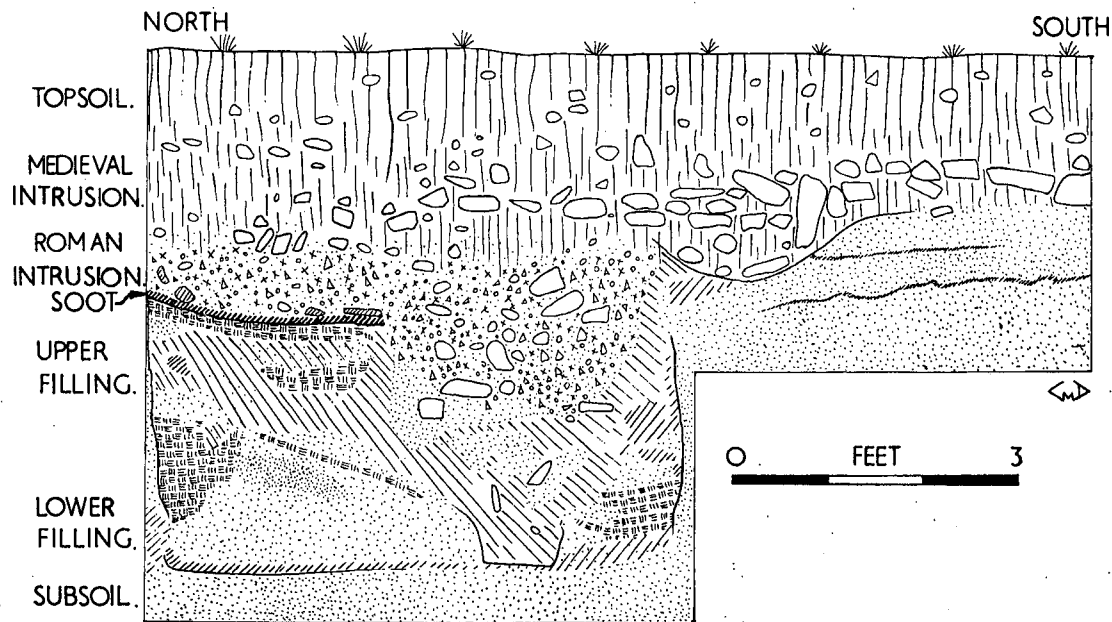


FIG. 4. SHORDEN BRAE : SECTION OF WEST SIDE OF PRIMARY BURIAL.

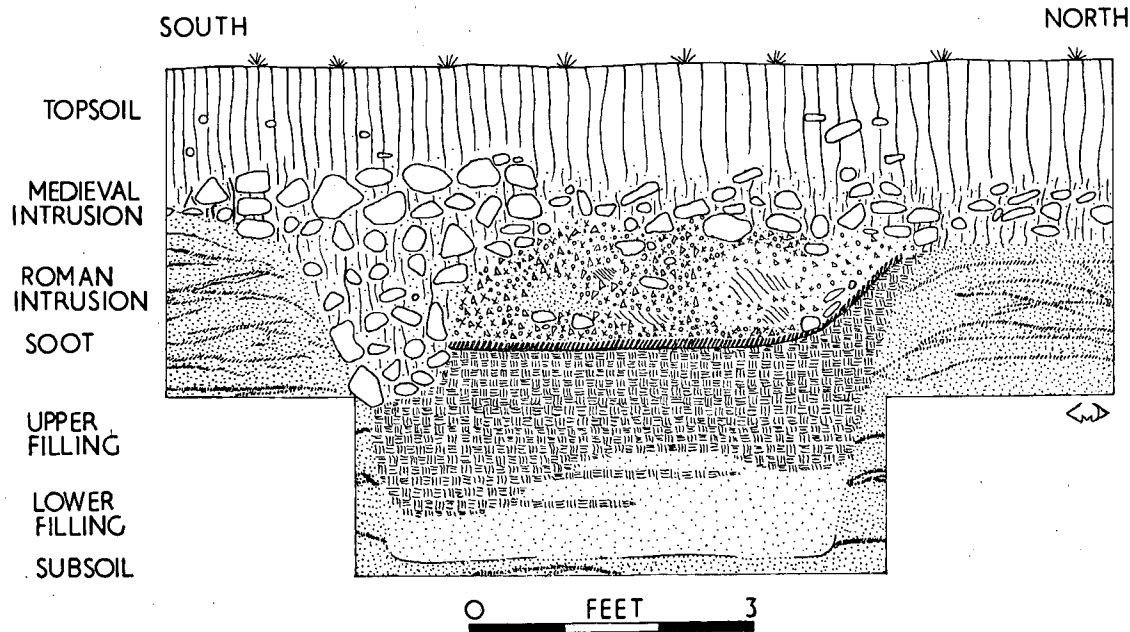


FIG. 5. SHORDEN BRAE: SECTION OF EAST SIDE OF PRIMARY BURIAL.

irregular layer of loose pieces of broken sandstone immediately underlay the plough soil at between 1 ft. and 2 ft. below the modern surface. Below this, and loosely filled with the same material, two furrow-like depressions ran across the interior space. The more southerly, the deeper, bit into the subsoil at the side of the shaft, and, on the west, penetrated both the debris of Roman demolition and the top of the shaft filling. Among the layer of stones below the topsoil were two very small fragments of pottery from separate vessels. One is buff coloured with a pale glaze, and the other dark grey with a mottled brown glaze. Both are typically medieval, and while they cannot be closely dated they can hardly be earlier than the thirteenth century at earliest. The precise nature of the activity is difficult to determine. Stone robbing is not a wholly satisfactory explanation as the monument seems already to have been dismantled in Roman times.

No significant structural remains were found in the area between the central monument and the precinct wall, though a few minor discoveries were made. To the south of the south-east angle of the monument, and clear of it by a margin of 3 ft., the debris of building material, including some small stones and fragments of typically Roman tiles, formed a large regular patch which is indicated on the plan. It lay immediately below present topsoil, and may therefore have been deeper before the field was ploughed. As it survived it occupied a flat-bottomed hollow cut 6 ins. into the top of the subsoil. Whether the deposit dates from the time of construction of the monument, or, as is more likely, the time of demolition, it does not appear to imply the existence of a separate structure. The presence of broken tiles is further slight evidence for the character of the superstructure of the monument. Immediately to the west of the patch of construction debris lay a group of cobbles of unexplained purpose, and still further west still more construction debris in an irregular patch. Several misshapen pieces of lead, one 6 ins. by 2 ins., were discovered above the north-west corner



SHORDEN BRAE: MAUSOLEUM FROM THE AIR, DURING EXCAVATION.



SHORDEN BRAE: FOUNDATION OF CENTRAL MONUMENT FROM SOUTH.





SHORDEN BRAE: PRIMARY BURIAL, CLEARED.



SHORDEN BRAE: FOUNDATION AT EAST WALL OF PRECINCT.







SHORDEN BRAE: SCULPTURES AT SOUTH-EAST ANGLE OF PRECINCT.



SHORDEN BRAE: LION AND STAG FROM SOUTH-EAST ANGLE.



of the foundation. It is possible that these too came from the superstructure of the monument.

Inside the eastern precinct wall, near the south-east angle, a continuous shallow feature, resembling a construction trench at first sight, ran north and south, approximately parallel with the foundation. It continued to the south wall and again beyond it. Further north it was associated with post-holes and handfuls of loose iron staples of modern type. These are undoubtedly the remains of the superseded field boundary, still marked on the 1922 edition of the 25 inches to 1 mile Ordnance Survey map, and showing as a dark line on the original aerial photograph. The only importance of these minor discoveries is to throw into relief the absence of traces of Roman structures inside the precinct, apart from the great monument itself.

The external dimensions of the foundation of the precinct wall are 134 ft. from east to west and 135 ft. from north to south. It is 5 ft. 6 ins. thick, and composed of precisely the same freestone and concrete as the foundation of the central monument. The top of the foundation lies immediately below the plough soil, and it is 3 ft. 4 ins. deep. Like the foundation of the monument it had been trench-built. The size and solidity of the foundation once more imply a substantial wall. Sufficient of the perimeter was uncovered at each angle and on all sides to reveal its precise character and position. No break in the foundation was encountered in the excavation, and it is clear from the aerial photograph that it was in fact continuous. No discontinuity in the now vanished wall was reflected in its foundation, and the position of any entrance or entrances into the consecrated area cannot therefore be ascertained.

Although the foundation had been trench-built, near the centre of the east side, on its inner face, a 30° sloping cut was observed running down into the subsoil from some 5 ft. clear of the foundation to immediately below it. In the otherwise clean sandy filling were a few stones of the same character as those in the foundation. This can hardly have any

meaning in connection with the initial construction, and may be connected with the dismantling of the wall.

At the point marked on the plan, outside the southern precinct wall, a circular pit, 4 ft. in diameter and 3 ft. deep, was discovered, sectioned and emptied; it contained no artifacts.

A large fragment from the heavy circular-section handle of a globular amphora was found embedded in the mortar of the foundation of the southern wall of the precinct, to west of its centre. On the handle is a rectangular stamp, 2 ins. by  $\frac{5}{16}$  in. Half of this is much worn, while the other half is legible. The reading is: IIIENNIO[———] retrograde, in small neat raised letters. Dr. M. H. Callender<sup>5</sup> dates the activity of this firm, the three Ennii, to the period A.D. 90-140. As the handle had without doubt been incorporated in the foundation at the moment of construction, this must therefore have been later than A.D. 90, might have been as late as A.D. 140, but need not have been much later than that unless long-term survival is assumed. This evidence is both independent of and consistent with that from the central burial shaft.

At both external northern angles it was observed that for about 3 ft. on either side of the point, the top of the foundation was a single course lower than usual. In each instance the corner stone of the dressed masonry which had once stood on the foundation had been deeper than its neighbours. The special treatment of the angles thus implied is confirmed and amplified by finds made outside the southern angles of the precinct wall.

When the south-eastern angle was uncovered it was noticed that while the sand running up to the foundation on the outside was clean, it had not the character of the natural water-laid subsoil in position, but of the same material dug out and replaced. Extended and deeper digging revealed a mass of dressed or sculptured stones (fig. 6). Clearly the foundation had been trench-built, here as elsewhere, but

<sup>5</sup> AA 4 xxvii, 86.

subsequently a large hole had been dug for the burial of the stonework. This included four blocks of finely dressed sandstone, three smaller facing stones, and two fragments from a sculptured group of a lion and a stag. The large blocks exhibited rebates, stepped mouldings, cramp holes and luis

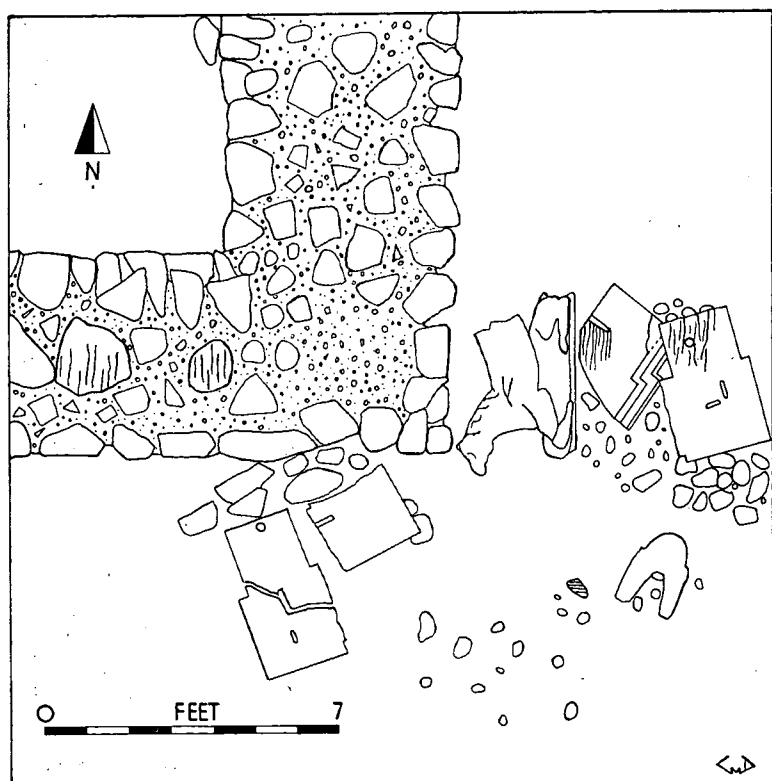


FIG. 6. SHORDEN BRAE: SCULPTURES AT SOUTH-EAST ANGLE OF PRECINCT.

holes. One block, fully 3 ft. 6 ins. long, was broken cleanly in two; it would appear to have been broken by falling, or being pushed, into the hole where it was found. Incised on one side of one of the stones was a group of four, and on an adjacent side of two, decorative motifs resembling closed

pairs of scissors, but doubtless intended to be of phallic significance. The blocks had evidently formed the base for the sculptured group, and had occupied a prepared level space at the south-east external angle, corresponding to those observed at the northern angles. The smaller facing stones, doubtless pushed into the hole accidentally, indicate the character of the masonry, a good quality ashlar, of the rest of the precinct wall. When the monument was dismantled the smaller masonry was doubtless carried off for re-use, this being presumably the motive for the operation, while the larger blocks and sculpture were tumbled into the hole.

Three datable fragments of Roman pottery were found in association with the buried masonry (fig. 3, nos. 2, 3, and 4). Part of a rounded-rim bowl, in grey fabric, of type 225, datable to the earlier part of the third century, was found near the fallen stones, immediately on top of the clean sand. Part of a mortarium, in whitish buff fabric, of type 275, datable to the turn of the third and fourth centuries, was found 3 ft. below the surface, a little above the clean sand, to the east of the fallen blocks. Part of a mortarium in pipeclay fabric, of type 281, datable to the earlier part of the fourth century, was found with the lion. These fragments can only have reached the position where they were found when the masonry and sculpture was buried. This cannot have been earlier than the close of the third century, and it may have been later, for these single pieces from separate vessels may all be rubbish survivals, as the bowl fragment almost certainly is. Dismantling therefore took place some time in the fourth century.

Immediately below the plough soil, at a depth of less than 2 ft., a thin medieval coin, 10 mm. in diameter, was found. The legend is too worn to be legible, but it is almost certainly an Edwardian farthing. It probably has no more bearing on the date of demolition than the pipe-stems, cart and plough fittings, modern, medieval and Roman pottery, or the worked flints, found in some abundance at the same general level over the whole site.

The sculptured group, 2 ft. 9 ins. high and carved from sandstone, represents a lion crouching over a stag, in an attitude familiar from many other examples in northern Britain and elsewhere, but contrasting with the four-square stance of the well-known Corbridge lion. The hindquarters of the lion were found broken off a few feet away. The only substantial portion of the group which is missing is the head of the stag, though its antlers are depicted in relief behind the lion's shoulders.

The lion and the stag had been much weathered before they were broken, while the breaks are unweathered. The group had clearly stood intact for a long time, and then been removed, broken and buried in one operation. While formal stratigraphic connection is absent, it is reasonable to suppose that this operation was contemporary with the first partial intrusion into the central burial, with the spreading of building debris south of the central monument, and with the digging away of some structure immediately inside the east precinct wall. While complete precision in these matters is unattainable, the degree of weathering on the lion may be compared with that on Roman building inscriptions from Haltonchesters<sup>6</sup> and from Risingham,<sup>7</sup> both of which had remained in position from a securely known to an approximately established date. The weathering of the lion sculpture appears to be consistent with its having stood in position for approximately two hundred years before being destroyed.

Immediately to the west of the south-west angle of the precinct, pushed in between its foundation and that of a tomb described below, was found part of the neck, shoulders and back of a carved stone lion. The concave curvature of the back, and the treatment of the mane, less weathered but otherwise identical, leave no doubt that it comes from a similar group to that from the south-east corner. Portions of large blocks from its pedestal, and smaller facing stones, were again discovered (fig. 7).

<sup>6</sup> AA 4 xiv, 161 and pl. xxiii.

<sup>7</sup> NCH xv, 130, no. 1 and pl. facing 80.

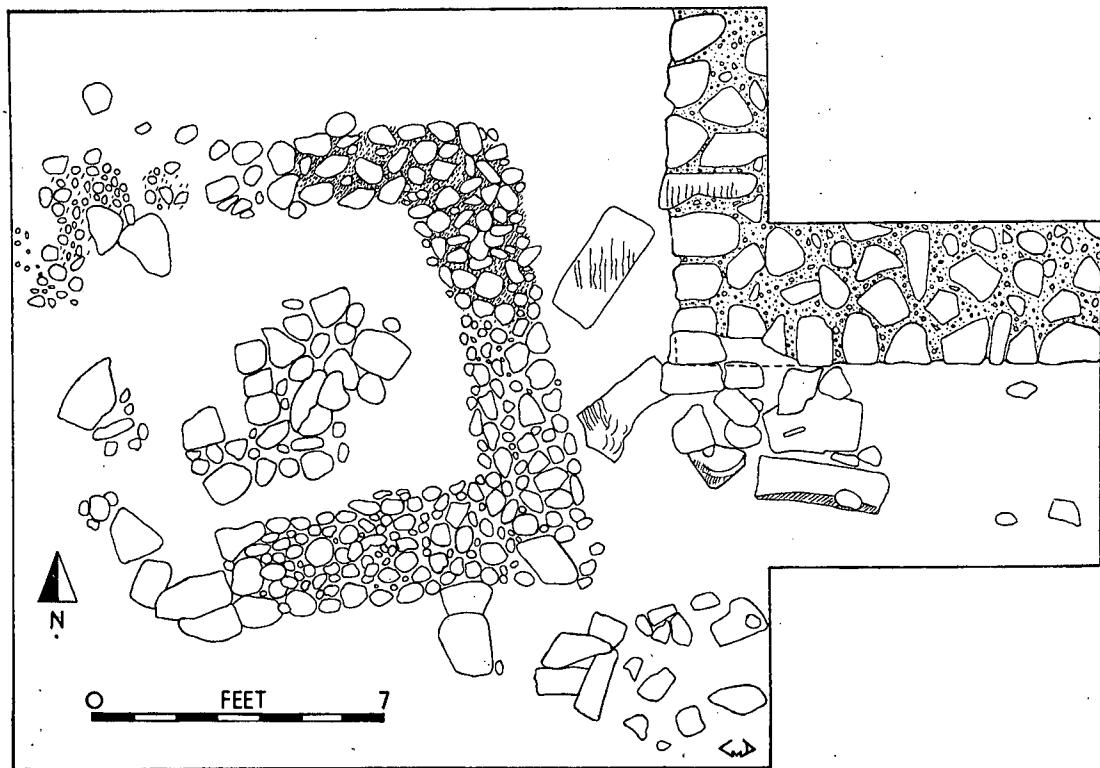


FIG. 7. SHORDEN BRAE: TOMB FOUNDATION AT SOUTH-WEST ANGLE OF PRECINCT.



There can be no doubt that each of the four corners of the precinct wall was similarly treated; a free-standing sculpture of a lion crouching over a stag was placed on an ornamental pedestal of large dressed blocks. The association, in Roman times, of the lion and its prey with death is well known.<sup>8</sup> The motif of a lion, sometimes clutching a human head in its paws, appears on either side of the gable of several tombstones from Britain, including examples from Stanwix, Gloucester and Colchester.<sup>9</sup> Two other groups, similar in attitude to those from the Shorden Brae mausoleum, were discovered in, or near, the Roman site at Corbridge: the famous Corbridge Lion which was found in 1907 reused as a fountain head in the *mansio*,<sup>10</sup> and the "Corbridge Cuddy", the precise origin of which is uncertain, which stood in Corbridge market place until removed to Matfen in the nineteenth century.<sup>11</sup> The association of lions with funeral monuments has frequently been attested, but two final, foreign examples may be given in passing. One is an impressively carved marble sarcophagus, probably of Italian origin, from Tarragona,<sup>12</sup> the side panels and corners of which are each carved with a lion devouring a stag. The other was noted by the second writer in the same year as the excavation on Shorden Brae, at Gasr Chanafes in the Wadi Scetaf, Tripolitania, where a fallen lion lies at each of the four corners of an elaborate, square, chambered tomb erected over one of the richer *limitanei* of the Libyan frontier.

While the main tomb stood in isolation in its square enclosure, smaller burials evidently crowded around it. At the south-west angle the clay and cobble foundation of a structure (fig. 7) was discovered on a slightly different

<sup>8</sup> and is carried into Christianity: "*adversarius vester diabolus, tanquam leo rugiens, circuit quaerens quem devoret*".

<sup>9</sup> *Lapidarium Septentrionale* no. 480 = *Handbook to the Roman Wall*, XIth edition, fig. on p. 205. I. A. Richmond, *Roman Britain*, 1955, pl. I. JRS xviii, pl. 23.

<sup>10</sup> AA 3 iv, 237 and pl. facing 205.

<sup>11</sup> *Lapidarium Septentrionale* no. 103 = *Black Gate Catalogue* no. 319.

<sup>12</sup> Now in the *Museo Paleocristiano de la Fábrica de Tabacos de Tarragona*. A. García y Bellido, *Esculturas Romanas de España y Portugal*, 1949, no. 274 and pl. on pp. 226-228.

orientation from that of the mausoleum. It measures 11 ft. 6 ins. from north to south, and, though the west side is represented only by cobbles, scattered by the plough, it was evidently once square. Where best preserved the foundation is 2 ft. wide, but little more than a single thickness of cobbles deep. A loose mass of stones in the centre, disturbed by the plough, may or may not have been structurally significant. Bones could not be expected in the soil conditions, and no grave goods were found. There can, however, be no doubt that the structure is all that remains of a square tomb.

Below the plough soil, in the brown sandy soil which covered both the tomb and the fallen large stones, was found a small plain example of a completely annular brooch (fig. 3, no. 5), in patinated bronze, or similar copper-based alloy. The point of the pin, which may once have been much longer, is broken off. So simple an artifact is not closely datable, but it would not be out of context in a fourth-century demolition layer. From the same deposit came an uninscribed fragment from a tombstone with a surviving segment of the moulding which had bordered a sunken panel.

An 8-ft. wide trench across the foundation of the west precinct wall, 60 ft. north of the south-west corner, revealed that here the ground outside the foundation had been disturbed. Though, apart from the presence of a few loose river cobbles, the sand was normal in colour and texture, rusty nails, fragments from a pottery vessel, and a coin, were found at a depth of about 4 ft. The pottery fragments are from a black burnished cooking-pot of type 147 or 148, datable to the early or mid fourth century.

The coin is bronze, 17 mm. in diameter. Both obverse and reverse are in crisp fresh condition, and imply a short circulation before burial. Damage to one edge immediately after discovery has removed part of the legend on both sides, but the coin remains identifiable:

Constantine the Great. AE 3.

*Obv.* [CONST]ANTI NVS MAX AVG — Emperor's bust in cuirass and paludamentum, head laureate with rosettes.

Rev. GLOR IAEXERC [ITVS] — PLG — two standards between two soldiers with spears and shields.  
A.D. 330-335.<sup>13</sup>

At this point the bottom of the foundation rested on the firm basis of a layer of natural river cobbles below the sand. In this layer the outline plan of a grave, running north and south, approximately parallel to the foundation and a foot away from it, showed up clearly (fig. 8). The south end of

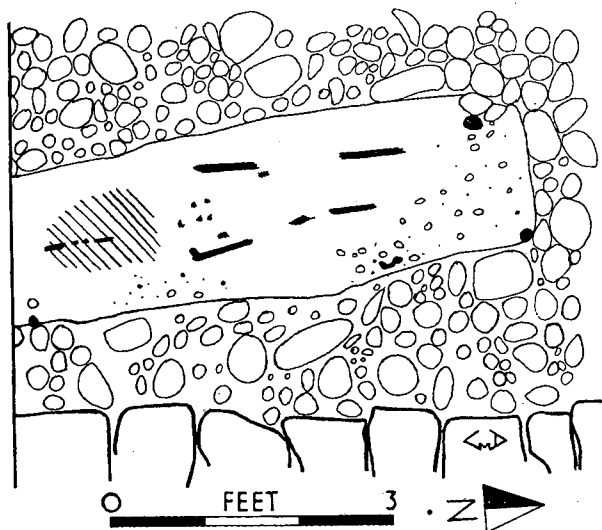


FIG. 8. SHORDEN BRAE: PLAN OF GRAVE ON WEST.

the grave was under the south side of the trench, which thus provided a section across it, while a length of 5 ft. 6 ins., at a width of 1 ft. 9 ins., was available for excavation. Extremely careful scraping of the sand filling, in arbitrary horizontal planes, a few millimetres at a time, was undertaken in the hope that traces of the decayed skelton might remain. In the course of this work a large example of a crossbow

<sup>13</sup> P. W. Hill and J. P. C. Kent, *Late Roman Bronze Coinage*, Part I, 1960, no. 180.

brooch, datable to the fourth century, was found close up against the southern side of the trench, 5 ft. below present ground level. In addition to loose nails already encountered, four nails were discovered rusted into position round the edges of the hole. Scraping eventually revealed traces of the bones. They showed up as a faint silver-grey discoloration of the sand when this was cleared to a horizontal plane a few inches below the top of the natural cobbles. The femora showed up particularly well, and were about 18 ins. long. The precise shape of the head of the right femur could be seen. The tibiae showed less clearly, while the feet could not be discerned. The pelvis was not visible, but the right ribs, as a single mass, and part of the spinal column, were almost as clear as the femora. The head lay under the side of the trench, to the south, and the find-spot of the brooch thus corresponds to a point not far below the chin. It says much for the skill and patience of the volunteer excavators that these results were obtained.

The coin and the pottery from the lower part of the filling of the shaft, together with the brooch from what was left of the body, form a small but consistent early to mid fourth-century group. The coin, closely dated and in good condition, shows that the burial took place not long after A.D. 330.

A study of the section (fig. 9) revealed that the grave had been dug down by the side of the foundation, which had originally been trench built, and then narrowed as it reached the hard natural cobble layer. The position of the grave thus appears to have been deliberately related to the precinct wall of the mausoleum, which had already been in existence for some two centuries. This implies that the wall was still visible, and possibly intact. There is already abundant evidence that the mausoleum was not allowed to fall into ruin but carefully dismantled. Experience on other sites enables a distinction to be made between Roman demolition of buildings for the reuse of the material, and haphazard post-Roman robbing of ruined and partly buried buildings.

Demolition then took place before the early fifth century. Pottery evidence from the south-east angle shows that it was after the end of the third century. If the precinct wall was still standing when the dated grave on the west was dug, as it appears to have been, then demolition had not taken place by A.D. 330 at earliest. The time of demolition is thus narrowed to the middle or later part of the fourth century. It was pre-

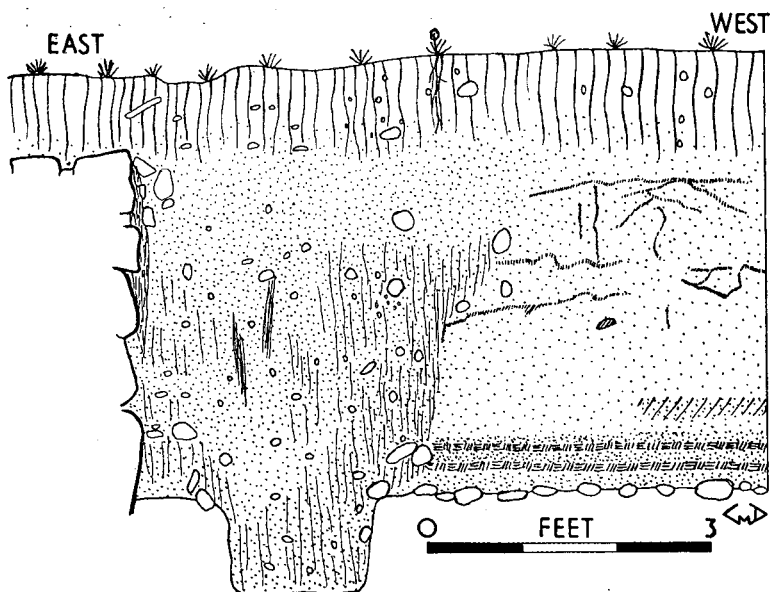


FIG. 9. SHORDEN BRAE: SECTION OF GRAVE ON WEST.

cisely at this period that cemeteries in London were robbed of their monuments to provide material for the addition of bastions to the city wall. It was also precisely at this period that the defences of many of the smaller towns of Roman Britain were re-modelled with added bastions, sometimes of reused material.<sup>14</sup> The mausoleum may well have been

<sup>14</sup> P. Corder, *The Reorganisation of the Defences of Romano-British Towns in the Fourth Century*, AJ cxii.

demolished to provide material for the improvement of the defences of the Roman town of Corbridge, in the disturbed conditions between A.D. 343 and 367.

To summarize the dating, the mausoleum was built in or soon after the second quarter of the second century. It stood for about two centuries, unaffected by anything but the weather. During this period other burials took place round, but not apparently within, the precinct. It was dismantled for its materials in or soon after the middle years of the fourth century. There was further activity on the site in the middle ages.

While there are no precise parallels to the Shorden Brae mausoleum within the province, three monuments, discovered at different dates within the rich civil area of Britain, have certain features in common with it. At Lullingstone, in Kent, two adults had been buried in leaden coffins, with rich grave goods, at the turn of the third and fourth centuries, to judge from the pottery, in a subterranean chamber below what appeared to be an otherwise normal Romano-Celtic temple.<sup>15</sup>

At Southfleet, Springhead, also in Kent, a monument excavated and planned at the beginning of the nineteenth century, was enclosed in a buttressed precinct wall some 60 ft. square externally.<sup>16</sup> Two mutually associated cremation burials underlay a square pavement. The central burial at Southfleet was not the only one within the enclosure, for a further cremation, and a pair of mutually associated inhumations, datable to the third century, were also found. Southfleet is more accurately described as a walled cemetery than as a mausoleum; nevertheless, though its linear dimensions are less than half those of the Shorden Brae mausoleum, the general plans are remarkably similar.

At Harpenden, in Hertfordshire, an enclosure some 100 ft. square, excavated in 1937, more nearly approaches the Shorden Brae dimensions.<sup>17</sup> The centrally placed internal

<sup>15</sup> JRS xlix, 132.

<sup>16</sup> R. F. Jessup, *Barrows and Walled Cemeteries in Roman Britain*, Journal of the Archæological Association 3 xvii, 29.

<sup>17</sup> Jessup, *op. cit.*, 22.

structure was here circular, 11 ft. in diameter. There were second-century cremation burials within the precinct.

These parallels, while not exact, indicate the general class of monument to which Shorden Brae belongs. It is significant that they are in Kent and Hertfordshire; most of the finest Roman-period burial monuments of all types lie in the civilian areas of the south and east of the province. It is probable that most of them are the graves of, or the monuments to, the richer native landowners, who may have continued Gallo-Belgic traditions in Roman form, or borrowed ideas from the provinces immediately across the Channel. Shorden Brae stands alone in the northern frontier region, not only in size and inferred magnificence, but also in type. It is unlikely because of its situation to be the tomb of a local aristocrat, and it is by no means impossible that it is the tomb of a senior officer or official. To attempt a closer identification would be to move into the realm of conjecture.





# SHORDEN BRAE MAUSOLEUM 1958.

